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Quest for Refuge in Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence

Abstract: The Indian women have always held certain incongruous position in our country. The status of women to the whole world ever have been all countless in their features, as they have been all too rich in their work of art and all multifaceted in their character. Chosen up from the different times and varied claims, even a random example of these images soon reveals the wide variety of affluence of their system, substance and handling each and every situation in a skilful way. There is, however, no denying the fact that once idealized and idolized images of women have undergone some exceptional transformation throughout the world, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries.

This prospect is the underlying theme of Shashi Deshpande's novels, That Long Silence. Shashi Deshpande has attached herself with the growing member of women writers

from India on whom the representation of the suffering but emotionless woman ultimately breaking conventional restrictions has had a major impact. The earlier novels by Indian women novelists venture the traditional image of women. As times change the portrayal become realistic with the trust on her sense of dissatisfaction and isolation. This brings to light the problems and struggles of woman, her quest for identity and her need to assert it. Shashi Deshpande portrays Jaya's original nature as the core of this novel. One can see Jaya constantly searching for herself. The novelist tries her hand in exhibiting the contrast characters of the protagonist Jaya and finally after many twists the way she finds a refuge in her marital home.

"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing". - Swami Vivekananda

The status of women to the whole world ever have been all countless in their features, as they have been all too rich in their work of art and all multifaceted in their character. Chosen up from the different times and varied claims, even a random example of these images soon reveals the wide variety of affluence of their system, substance and handling each and every situation in a skilful way. There is, however, no denying the fact that once idealized and idolized images of women have undergone some exceptional transformation throughout the world, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries.

According to Indian custom, a woman must be submissive to her husband in every possible aspect. She must make her nuptial home pleasurable for him. She must cook food, wash the dishes and take care of his children. She must not question about money and she must accept to her husband's every demand. But what happens when the old customs lose their power and the woman no longer believes her life should be rigid in the constricted manner? This prospect is the underlying theme of Shashi Deshpande's novels, *That Long Silence*, in which her lead protagonist Jaya, undergoes intense changes against the setting of

an India that is also developing. There is a change in principles and women have started acknowledging themselves equal to man. Though the high hopes of feminism have been washed away the present environment, the relationship between man and woman becomes one of the controlled interdependence. Still the woman has to work for her freedom without resigning herself to her fate. Gender equality seemed to be an illusion.

Shashi Deshpande has attached herself with the growing member of women writers from India on whom the representation of the suffering but emotionless woman ultimately breaking conventional restrictions has had a major impact. The limited aspect of the relationship between man and woman has been decided by man and not by woman. Man who dominates woman by imposing his limits on her. She accepts it because of the way she has been brought up by the society she lives. Very frequently, this acceptance is not match with the reality that lies beneath. K.M.Thakkar observes that

“Modern women prefer to exercise her choice and break away from her traumatic experiences. Women are now portrayed as more assertive, more liberated in their view and more articulate in their expression than the women of the past. Instead of downgrading the elements of suffering at the hands of her lover or her husband or man, she has started asserting her substantive identity in action, not in words. Whether it is Devi of Gita Hariharans’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*, or Sita in Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, or Lucy of J.M.coetzee’s *Disgrace*, the women have established a coherent class structure – one of assertion of identity and defiance of male supremacy and protest at being subordinated by man.”(1 –P-48)

The earlier novels by Indian women novelists venture the traditional image of women. As times change the portrayal become realistic with the trust on her sense of dissatisfaction and isolation. This brings to light her problems, her struggles, her quest for identity and her need to assert it. The characters are in a dilemma caught between tradition and modernity.

Their predicament of sticking to the family values pulls them apart. The situation of the working women are still worse, because they have to lead a balanced life without getting entangled between their work spot and family which naturally makes the women search for their identity.

With a contribution of intelligent psychological approach into the nuances of human mind and society and supported by a vivid, modest and natural style, Shashi Deshpande is perhaps ideally suited to treat the complicated tracts of human psyche and convincingly represent it in fiction. Her novels particularly, *That Long Silence*, and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* deals with people who lose their power of rational thinking on being made to face distressing situations.

Jaya of *That Long Silence*, when required to face a disturbing situation for the time being seeks shelter in obsession without being aware that she is an adult. Her agony has a favorable effect on her. It helps her in the process of discovering herself, which leads her in the last analysis to her new insight of life. She appears at the end of the tribulation as a woman with certain readiness to compromise life's problems while previously she showed an obvious lack of adjustment.

Jaya Kulkarni is a self satisfied house-wife. Having married a responsible man Mohan, and blessed with two children, Rahul and Rati, and a home and material comforts, she seems to have almost nothing to ask for in life. To achieve this stage of contentment as a woman, Jaya has thoroughly concealed every aspect of her personality that refused to fit into her image as wife and mother.

Shashi Deshpande pays more attention on male-female enmity as felt by Jaya. Her feministic attitude does not allow her to live a suppressed life with Mohan and she is striving to find her identity in the marital life, but somehow she manages to keep a little bit of her own identity and her own individuality. As a married woman, she has becomes dependent on

her husband Mohan and this she considers insulting; she feels that she has made herself as a stereo type of woman, always tense, unskilled, who is always in need of male assistance and support. In her marital life, she wishes to maintain an individual identity. Her longing for individualism makes her become aware of her awesome power over her husband.

Shashi Deshpande portrays Jaya's original nature as the core of this novel. One can see Jaya constantly searching for herself. She is a person who cannot be judged easily because of her complex nature. But she has any noble qualities like patience, devotion in her work, truthfulness and at the same time she is also very bold, rebellious and disobedient at times. This alternate change in her attitude is due to her constant search for a identity. Thus the young bride Suhasini is at disagreement with the grown-up and experienced Jaya who is both suppressive and fierce. The tradition bound passive woman in Jaya is incompatible with the modernist personality in Jaya. The devoted, affectionate Jaya, the dutiful wife of Mohan at a point of life gets pleasure when she gets a chance to embrace Kamat. So, the novelist is able to impart a varied identity to Jaya, focusing at the same time the self-centered humane aspects of womanhood.

The novelist tries her hand in exhibiting the contrast characters of the optimistic Suhasini to whom being a dutiful wife gives immense pleasure and wifhood as a great fortress of joy, and the later disappointed wife resembling the grown-up Jaya. The former self has departed; the latter one is in agony. Jaya is able to maintain sufficient psychological balance and keep away from the state of split personality.

After she was deserted by her husband Mohan, she loses her peace of mind and grows wild like her former friend Kusum. Her inner state of mind is described by the novelist in the following words: "I could feel myself gasping, drowning in the darkness, the wild flailing panic stricken movement that I was making, taking me lower and lower into the vertex".(P-125) the rhythm, the pace and the syntax of this prose are reminiscent of *Cry The Peacock*.

As a writer, Jaya is accused by Mohan of not being a wife of his expectations, particularly in the story in which she was writing, she writes about a couple where the husband approaches his wife only for quenching his physical thirst and has no love or any emotional attachment towards her. She could not bear the suppression and abandonment of her husband that she expresses her mental agony in the role of the writer. During the period of her separation from Mohan, she recklessly resorts to frantic writing. But very soon she understood that she is a failure as a writer because all of her stories lacked the genuine feelings. Now she learnt that she has not only failed as a writer but also failed in life.

Jaya happens to read the Sanskrit words in her Appa's diary, "Yatheccchasi tatha kuru"-I had seen the Sanskrit words in Appa's diary after his death and, curious to know what they meant and why Appa had written them down as if they meant something to him. I had asked Ramuka about that line. It was Ramuka who told me the line was from Bagavad Gita. The final words of Krishna's long sermon to Arjuna. "Do as you desire. I would thought it something of a cheat. Imagine the Lord, any Master telling disciples....."Do as you desire"(192)

After reading appa's diary there was a transformation in Jaya and she was so overwhelmed on receiving the telegram from Mohan which read "All well". It was the happiest moment in her life. People don't change, Mukta said. It is true. It doesn't change overnight. It is possible that we may not change over long period of time, but we can always hope without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know, now it is this; life has always to be made possible"(193)

With an optimistic thought Jaya is ready to receive Mohan and her children. She finds refuge by uniting with her family once again.

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